

**NEWS**

Meet the faces of new staff members.

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**STUDENT LIFE**

Read about the ASB president's vision for the school year.

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# BEAR WITNESS



AUGUST 2025

BRANHAM HIGH SCHOOL

BHSBEARWITNESS.ORG

**NEW FOOTBALL COACH**

## Leading the way

**ELLIOTT YAU***Managing Editor***COLIN KALANGES, ENOCH SHIN, CAIN CHENG, HYUNSEO YOO***Staff Writers*

**Tommy McMahon** is the new head coach of the football team.

After graduating from Branham in 2012, McMahon worked as the offensive coordinator from 2014 to 2024. This season, McMahon wants to implement four main goals for all of his players: graduate from high school, serve and inspire the community, become mentally-tough individuals who can make the right decisions and win the CCS championship. He hopes to use football as a platform for players, not only on the field, but through community, academics and post-graduation success.

"I have a much greater opportunity now being able to impact everyone on the team, starting with building a certain culture, which will help the kids more than just on the field," McMahon said.

Senior **Noah Ybarra**, who plays left tackle, believes McMahon's new coaching philosophy has been successful.

"This foundation he is setting and building is way better than anything we've ever had before," Ybarra said. "Setting it from the start was the best thing that could have happened for our program."

Senior **Christopher King**, who plays cornerback, agrees with McMahon's emphasis on building up players from within rather than focusing on winning every game.

"At the end of the day, football is four years of most of these people's lives — eight, if they're lucky to go to college," King said. "It's a lot more important to develop the team, but also individuals into people they can be proud of."

One way McMahon works to shape players into better people and teammates is through weekly "Lead the Way" meetings. Every Monday, McMahon presents or invites guest speakers to talk about aspects of life outside of the football field.

"There's portions that apply to the football field, but the main priority is teaching these kids valuable life lessons and things that are going to help them be successful post high school," McMahon said.

Reactions have been mixed. According to King, while some people find the meetings boring, many take McMahon's advice well.

"It's not necessarily fun to talk about being an adult, but it's something you have to do," King said. "It's nice to hear what he has to say, and it's given me a lot of insight into where I want to be and how I want to be as a person and a football player."

Besides setting new goals for the team, McMahon has also brought a newer coaching style. King noted that quick segments and water breaks in between drills make practice feel more fast-paced.

Skipping practice or misbehaving in the weight room results in stricter punishments like sled pushes instead of missing playing time. Ybarra said a lack of effort or discipline means three burpees for the whole team.

"If one person messes up, we all pay for it," Ybarra said. "We succeed together and we lose together. Learning that aspect has built the trust within me [in] my teammates. That's going to be the big difference maker when it comes down to close situations."

This level of trust did not exist last year, and the team was divided even during their victories, according to Ybarra.

"The aspect of truly being a team wasn't ever apparent until Coach Tommy stepped in. Our emotions towards each other and the way we treat each other is so much better, and it wouldn't be possible if we weren't leading the way and trying to be what we all say we're gonna be," Ybarra said. "The bond we've built through this new foundation is so much stronger than it's ever been, and it's gonna be so apparent when we ultimately get to take the field in a couple weeks."

**\$300,620**

is the value of the contract with Polychrome Construction to repaint the exterior walls, underside of walkways and lockers. The budget was approved on May 15 and later finalized on Aug. 7.

**10**

years ago — the last time all older buildings were repainted. The exterior walls of the buildings were previously a peach color.

**S**tudents enter the new school year with a freshly painted campus. Good luck to all starting the 2025-26 school year! | See **page 2**

Kailey Fu/Bear Witness

# NEWS

## CAMPUS RENOVATION | Summer paint job

From PAGE 1

**YUJIN CHO**  
Editor-in-Chief

**EMILIANO GONZALEZ, REBECCA TOCHILNIKOV, CATHERINE CARTER**  
Staff Writers

**D**uring the summer, the campus was transformed with a new paint job, brightening the hallways and refreshing lockers.

During the summer, the campus was transformed with a new paint job which brightened the hallways and refreshed lockers.

Polychrome Construction applied fresh coats of navy, gray and white paint as well as a blue trim to the underside of walkways, lockers, doorframes and exterior walls of all buildings except for the two-story buildings S, J, C and B. After finalizing the contract in August, CUHSD will pay \$300,620 in total.

Principal **Beth Silbergeld** thinks that repainting old parts of the campus enhanced the school's environment.

"It makes students and staff feel cared for because whenever we have the opportunity to change something aesthetically, [it] is an improvement," Silbergeld said. "It improves our mood. It makes us feel seen."

The brighter colors make the school feel "happier" and "more modern," according to junior **Corryn Swihart**. Beyond aesthetic purposes, the revamp can also impact how students feel about their experience at school.

"It [makes] it more fun to come to school," Swihart said. "It's really nice to be in an environment that you like to look at, especially spending so much time here."

English teacher **Heather Amanatullah**, who has taught at Branham for 13 years, hopes that the revamp will positively influence student behavior.

"It looks so much newer [and] cleaner," Amanatullah said. "Sometimes your surroundings start to match how you behave, so I'm hoping on campus this year the kids will clean up their stuff more and take more care and respect for our surroundings."

In addition to changes to the exteriors of buildings, some classrooms were repainted over the summer by on-campus and CUHSD custodial staff members. In Amanatullah's classroom, the walls were repainted and repaired.

"For your space around you to feel as you want it to feel, it makes it a more conducive learning environment for your



Elliott Yau/Bear Witness

**A maintenance worker paints the underside of the walkway white during the summer.**

students," Amanatullah said. "It makes it a more joyful place for your kids."

While Amanatullah thinks that the new paint has improved the campus, she wishes that other issues in her classroom that impact students more directly were addressed. Specifically, the air conditioning, which has a range of temperatures pre-programmed by the district, constantly made her classroom cold and affected instruction last year, but the issue hasn't been fixed.

"I don't know if paint was the most urgent matter," Amanatullah said. "Just fixing the aesthetics might be avoiding some of the deeper issues that some teachers have been asking and requesting from the district, so we'll see."

The approval of Measure P — a school bond measure that authorized \$474 million in bonds to be adopted by CUHSD — last November increased funding for facility repairs, technology upgrades and improvements to school sites. CUHSD is planning additional changes to Branham in efforts to modernize facilities and improve students' experience in high school, according to Silbergeld. CUHSD plans to demolish some older buildings to replace them with new two-story buildings next summer.

"We're just getting started with some of the ways in shifting — what it looks like and feels like," Silbergeld said. "But change also takes time."

### NEW TEACHERS



**KATHRINE DEMAREE**

English Teacher



**ERIC VENCES**

Spanish Teacher



**MIKE ESPINOZA**

English Teacher

"It is important that young people are taking action in their own communities, and I like to be a part of that process."



**ARMANDO AGUILAR**

Counselor

"I am looking forward to this role [as a counselor], being able to support students in a different capacity than what I was doing back in middle school."



**CHRISTIAN MONCADA**

History Teacher

"I started out teaching on the east side for a couple of years. Then, over the last two years, I came over to Westmont, and now I am at Branham."



**SARAH CARRUTH**

Special Education

"Every single teacher I have met has been awesome and all of the students I have met have been really great. I think it is going to be a good school year."



**ZYLEE AUGENSTEIN**

Physical Education

"I loved PE [at Branham]. It is awesome to experience a full circle and come back and teach at my own high school."



**MARY MCLELLAN**

Math Teacher

"I look forward to getting to know students, and I hope that they are successful."



**DARREN MARGIE**

Special Education

"I am very empathetic. My biggest core value is to be kind to each other, be respectful and to spread love."

Interviews by Dylan Collisson, Vanessa Perez, Reese Richard and Danna Triana Torres



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Mission Statement:

The Bear Witness is committed to providing accurate, timely coverage of local and world news while connecting these events to the lives of our diverse student body.

Website: bhsbearwitness.org

Phone: (408) 626-3407

Email: bhsbearwitness@gmail.com

Address: 1570 Branham Lane, San Jose, CA 95118

CLASS OF 2029

ASB PRESIDENT

## Return to service

EMMETT SPEAR  
*News Editor*ANYA GUPTA, KAILEY FU,  
AMY GUNASEELAN  
*Staff Writers*

Newly elected ASB President **Lilly Murphy** plans to utilize her past experiences inside and outside of ASB to make the class more service-oriented this upcoming school year.

When Murphy was a freshman in 2022, ASB worked to contribute towards acts of service such as annual blood drives and Diabetes Awareness Week, but over recent years she says the class has shifted towards the spirit side of Branham. To counteract this shift, Murphy plans to implement a new ASB service commission aiming to incorporate ASB acts of service into all school events the 2025-2026 school year. Initiatives like a food drive during Winter Wishes.



"We have such a unique platform in ASB, and we have access to a lot of materials," Murphy said. "If we have access to that platform, we should be using it for service 100% of the time."

During Murphy's freshman year, the ASB class was structured very differently with a separate freshman ASB class. Due to this divide, there was a lack of executive leadership overlooking the freshman class.

"Because we didn't have that president in the class, I took on that role, and that really prepared me for this position," Murphy said.

In her sophomore year, Murphy lost the running for class president. Although she wanted to quit, she instead took on the position of outreach director, a part of the senate branch of ASB. Murphy saw the role as having much less authority than her previous one.

"It made me realize that leadership isn't how much authority or power you have in a position, but rather it's the impact you're able to make in that position and the people you're able to affect," Murphy said. "It really tweaked the way I think about leadership, and that's why I decided to run for president."

As she moves into this leadership role, Murphy feels she is very different from past presidents. Although she has her personal strengths, she believes that she lacks the organizational skills others excelled in.

"I'm a little nervous that I'm just gonna miss things because I'm not quite as organized, but I'm working on it. We're getting there," Murphy said. "I'm getting better at being on my phone and organizing all of that."

Despite being nervous about organization, Murphy is looking forward to the many different aspects and jobs of being president, such as meeting the incoming freshmen and becoming a role model for them.

"I hope that I can really be somebody that makes them passionate about ASB, because I really am," Murphy said. "I definitely had those people there when I was a freshman that made me passionate for ASB, and that's why I am here today."

## EXPECTING SUCCESS

Freshmen share their goals and expectations for their first year at Branham

—Compiled by Alyx Yoon, Andrew Ho, Amelia Martorano, Kendall Ladd and Yujin Cho

**"It's a big question mark ahead. I'm unsure what I'm walking into. I also want to make a lot of new friends because there's so many more new people."**

—Katie Wehrmaker



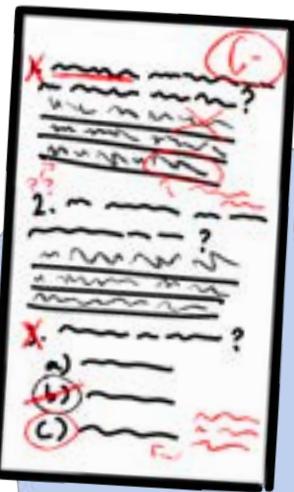
Emi Mohanrao/Bear Witness



Amelia Martorano/Bear Witness

**"I was really excited to make friends because I got tired of knowing everybody in my grade. I want to meet new people, and I want to see who's out there."**

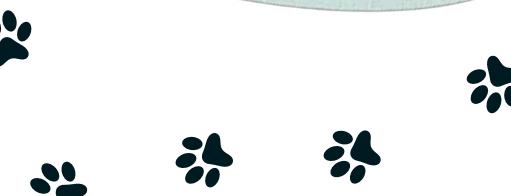
—Rosalie Homer



Kailey Fu/Bear Witness

**"When my Link Leader talked about test retakes, some teachers don't allow that kind of stuff so I was surprised about that."**

—Ryan Kim



Danna Triana Torres/Bear Witness

**"I came from a small school, so I feel like it's a big change since there's a lot of campus."**

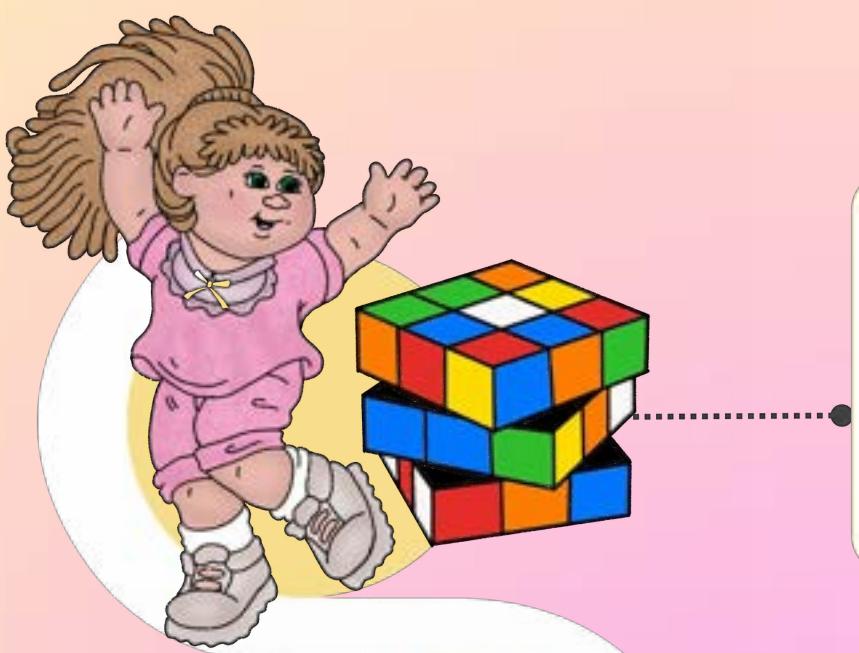
—Christina Anderson

## THE BACKPAGE

## DECades of DESIRE

Since its inception, modern consumerism has grown and changed significantly. From teachers to students, the Branham community has experienced the evolving trends in toys and collectibles.

—Compiled by Aryella Finkel-Hozer and Sienna Moss  
Illustrations by Taylor Urquhart



## 1980s

## CABBAGE PATCH KIDS AND RUBIK'S CUBES

"We would bring [Rubik's Cubes] to school and play with them during recess. It was something to occupy the time of not having social media or cable TV."

—Kirk Selfridge, AP Government teacher



## 1990s

## TAMAGOTCHIS AND BEANIE BABIES

"A lot of people had Beanie Babies, but for me I put all the safety pins in its ears and nose. I was like, 'Yes, I have this same thing that everybody has, but for me this is how I'm different.'"

—Barbara Arduini, English teacher



## 2000s

## POKEMON CARDS AND BEYBLADES

"[Playing with Beyblades] was another way to be competitive on rainy days or even just at school during recess when I wasn't playing sports."

—Kaleb Lane, athletic director



## 2010s

## SHOPKINS AND FIDGET SPINNERS

"I remember my friend gave me [a fidget spinner] — I think that was my first one. [Consumerism] depends on what people are liking."

—Pasha Znamerovsky (11)

## 2020s

## LABUBUS AND JELLYCATS

"[Labubus] show how aesthetics have changed as well as what is being more treasured over periods of time."

—Kaci Nguyen (12)